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# Philippe Pinel









# PHILIPPE PINEL

## A MEMORIAL SKETCH

BY

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*G. A. P.*

BOSTON

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THIS little sketch is written and printed at the request and at the expense of Mr. James Munson Barnard to accompany a reproduction of the picture in the Salpêtrière Insane Asylum, of Pinel striking off the fetters of the inmates.

*December, 1902.*



# PHILIPPE PINEL

1745-1826

THE life of Pinel can be outlined in a few words. He was the son of a physician in moderate circumstances at Saint-André-d'Alayrac in the department of Tarn. He studied medicine at the neighboring cities of Toulouse and Montpellier, and finally at Paris. He was the successor to Cuvier's seat in the Institute, professor of medical physics and of internal pathology at the Faculté de Médecine of Paris, author of a series of works on insanity, and physician at Bicêtre and the Salpêtrière.

All this should be told, for it forms the register of a life which rose by its own merit from poverty to eminence and honor. But the one fact which the world cares for remains to be told: he first struck off the fetters of the insane, and replaced barbarism by humanity in their treatment.

Pinel had the good fortune to live at a time when great reforms were called for. The treatment of prisoners and of the insane can hardly have been more dreadful at any time in the world's history than it was in the latter half of the eighteenth century. In strange contrast to the new philanthropic and philosophic ideas of the day, cruelty prevailed everywhere. Hanging was inflicted for petty larceny in England. The British navy was a hell afloat. The French peasantry were crushed under an incredible tyranny. It is significant

that Pinel's work was contemporaneous with that of John Howard, the prisoners' friend, and that of William Tuke, founder of the York Retreat for the Insane. These three led the advance-guard of modern philanthropy in a callous age, and they deserve to be joined in our love and reverence.

William Tuke represents the Quaker spirit at its best. The establishment of the Retreat was due to a movement among his sect, which had its origin in cruel treatment of a member at the notorious asylum at York. It was conducted by Tuke upon principles identical with those of Pinel, although the two men seem to have worked in entire independence of each other. He and his successors of the same name have made his family illustrious for four generations in Britain.

The treatment of the insane was pretty much alike in England and on the Continent. They were locked up in stone dungeons without other furniture than a plank and a pile of straw, without light or fire, and left to wallow in filth, or, when cleansed, it was done with broom and mop as one would clean a pig. Nearly naked, they were overrun with vermin, sometimes killed by the bites of rats, often frost-bitten, often suffering gangrene of the extremities in consequence. Scurvy and dysentery raged among the half-starved inmates. The attendants were slatterns and ruffians, armed with sticks and attended by dogs, carrying handcuffs, and empowered to chain up all whom it suited their convenience to treat thus. Nor were these proceedings exceptional. King George III., while insane, is said to have been knocked "as flat as a flounder" by the scientific



fist-treatment of an attendant. A stern attitude, curses, chains, and floggings were in fact considered by the medical science of the day as appropriate and necessary treatment; and the superintendents of the time seem to have gone frantic in methodical and ingenious barbarity, skilfully planned to terrify and prostrate the patient. In fact, mankind seemed to have considered the insane as scarcely human beings.

In 1792 Pinel had attained an eminence in his profession which led to his recognition as the only man in France capable of reforming the management of the Paris hospitals. He was appointed by the Commune to take charge of the Hospice de Bicêtre, an immense civic institution, containing, among other inmates, some two hundred insane men, of whom fifty-three

were kept in chains. He applied for leave to remove the fetters. An official accompanied him on a visit of inspection. "Woe to thee if thou hidest the enemies of the people among the lunatics!" was the grim warning, with a suggestion of the guillotine. The official made his visit, but soon tired of the monotonous sights and sounds of confusion and terror. "Look here, citizen," said he to Pinel, "art thou mad thyself, that thou wilt unchain such animals?" "Citizen," was the lofty reply, "I am convinced that these lunatics are so unmanageable only because they are robbed of air and liberty; and I dare to hope much from the opposite means of treatment." "Well, do as pleases thee. I give them into thy hand; but I fear thou wilt be the victim of thy presumption." Pinel began his work the same day. In less than a week these fifty-three furious

and ungovernable men, some of whom had worn chains from ten to thirty years, had been unfettered. Contrary to expectation, no violence occurred: the men received their liberty quietly, and a new spirit of order appeared.

The scene illustrated in the accompanying picture belongs to his experiences in the Salpêtrière, the women's establishment, about two years later. The same abuses and atrocities prevailed there as at the Bicêtre, and the same opposition had to be overcome; but the results were equally satisfactory.

Pinel's reformatory measures did not stop here, but extended to a renovation of the whole system, abolishing dungeons, improving the light and air and diet, providing special nurses, and building workshops

for the patients' employment. He anticipated in essence the whole of modern reform, up to the time when Conolly gave a logical completion to his idea by insisting on the removal of all bodily restraint.

Pinel was not a product of the French Revolution. He shrank from the horrors which were perpetrated about him. In unchaining his patients, he took his life in his hands, surrounded as he was by the fierce jealousy of the factions which were trying Louis XVI. for his life, and which wrought the deeds of the First Terror. His was not the courage of a revolutionary statesman. It was the courage of the tender and merciful soul, the man of religion, the good son, the student philosopher, the lover of the wretched. It was the courage of the man of sympathetic insight who dares to trust to his insight in oppo-

sition to almost universal public and professional belief. In paying a tribute of gratitude to such a man, we render a tribute to the divine possibilities in human nature.











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